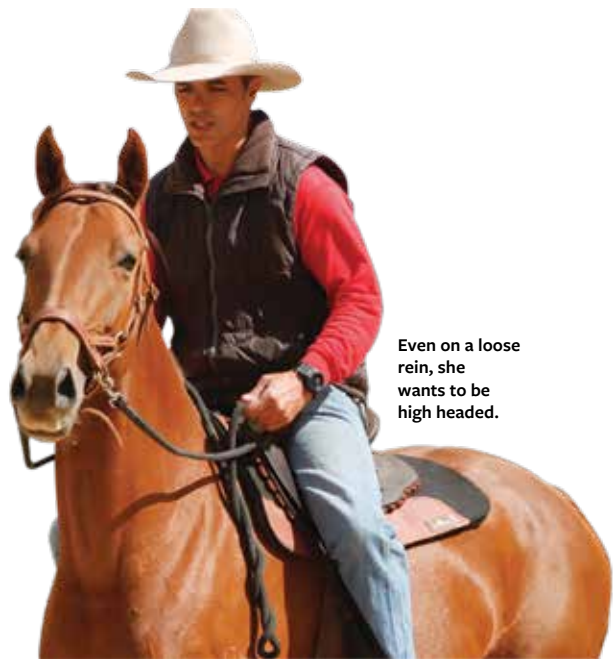


Understanding equals control

More and more people are becoming interested in going bitless. At the same time they are able to see it is much kinder for the horse, they often question whether it's possible to control a bitless horse. That's because transitioning from bitted to bitless can often uncover 'holes' in the training of both horse and rider.



Even on a loose rein, she wants to be high headed.

It's why I tell them 'bits do not collect horses – proper training and understanding does'.

The three main types of bitless 'bridles' – the hackamore. But a 'crossover' and 'sidepull' are also options. Whatever you might choose, remember the principles for using any bridle – bitted or bitless – are the same.

Control is about learning to manage parts of your horse – the neck, shoulders, hindquarters and feet. There really isn't much bend in a horse's body, it's actually lateral flexion through the neck that gives you 90% of control. If you try control a horse by putting pressure on the mouth – with a bit – you simply cause him to panic from pain. Get the horse to understand what you are asking in a calm way and his body will follow.

If a rider causes the horse pain through a bit, it's not surprising the horse may develop a fear of the rider. This fear, which interrupts clear, calm communication with the horse, is another reason problems develop. If the rider is also scared, that interruption is greater because of the likelihood that the rider will be riding with tight contact on the bit.

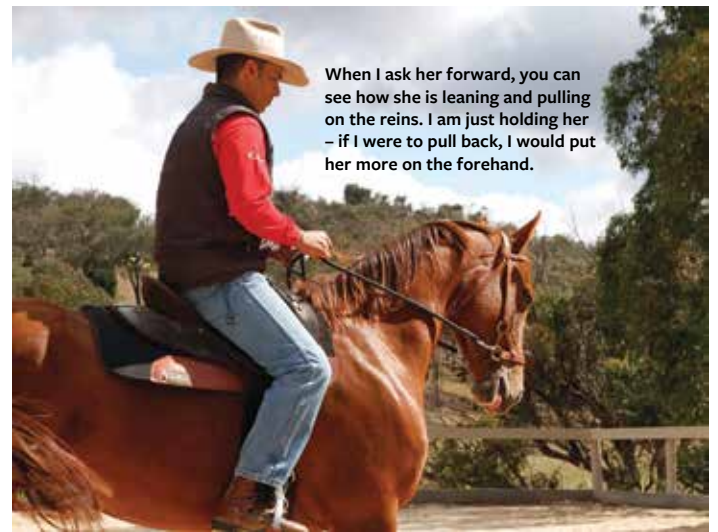
This warmblood mare (right) came for training – she is naturally a very high-headed horse. On a bitted bridle, I can

guarantee you she would be even more high-headed in an effort to avoid the bit. It's at this point that you will hear people suggest using tools – like draw reins – to force the head down into a pretend frame. But that only causes the horse to break at the wrong point (instead of being poll high) and remain heavy on the forehand.

This is the sort of horse who would end up being ridden in a martingale and an increasingly stronger bit in an effort by the rider to keep that head down or even lunged for hours with side reins. That's not going to fix anything. It's like putting a bandaid on



By Carlos Tabernerri



When I ask her forward, you can see how she is leaning and pulling on the reins. I am just holding her – if I were to pull back, I would put her more on the forehand.



Instead, I ask for a reinback so that she must use her hindquarters instead of leaning on my reins and hands. You can see her start to soften slightly.



You can see that she has softened at the poll, yet remains poll high.



And she is able to maintain that self-carriage as we walk forward on a better carriage and soft rein.